

COMPETENCIES FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION
AT PATTEN UNIVERSITY

by
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Abstract

Patten University has been asked to develop one or more online degree programs for Church of God pastors and other professionals. The online program provides an opportunity to employ several instructional design theories that may enhance and increase the effectiveness of this training program and increase learning opportunities. This paper identifies 47 competencies needed by online instructors and outlines a potential training program for Patten University that will lay a proper foundation and satisfies three of the 24 benchmarks for excellence recommended by the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

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Introduction

Phipps and Merisotis (2000) assert that the effectiveness of distance learning must be measured in results—quality learning—by students. They identify 24 benchmarks (Table 1) "considered essential to ensuring excellence in Internet-based distance learning" (p. vii). While several of those benchmarks address factors such as technological issues and institutional support, others address course development, teaching and learning, course structure, student support, faculty support, and evaluation and assessment. They cite two comments from participating faculty—one that "the technical aspect of online teaching is sometimes overwhelming" (p. 20); the other that "pedagogy of online learning must be part of training and the online environment" (p. 20). These comments suggest that teaching online can be challenging to instructors who have previously engaged in face-to-face instruction.

Teaching in an online environment requires specific sets of skills (competencies). Palloff and Pratt (2001) note, "Teaching in the cyberspace classroom requires that we move beyond traditional models of pedagogy into new practices that are more facilitative" (p. 20). They also state, "Not all faculty are suited for the online environment" (p. 21). Furthermore:

"Faculty cannot be expected to know intuitively how to design and deliver an effective online course. Although courses and programs about the use of technology in education are emerging in institutions of higher education and are available to teachers in training, more seasoned faculty have not been exposed to techniques and methods needed to make online work successful (p. 23)."

Levy (2003) states:

"Though the principles of instructional design are not altogether different in ODL [online distance learning] than they are for the traditional classroom, instructors need training and support to be willing to adopt this new teaching paradigm. Instructors need to be cognizant of how the details of their course will be implemented in the new environment. Courses for ODL programs need to be clearly planned and designed (McNaught, 2002). Replacing the current educational model in digital format is not sufficient (Weigel, 2000)." (¶ 12).

Table 1

 Benchmarks essential to ensure quality in Internet-based distance education

Institutional Support Benchmarks

1. A documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (i.e., password protection, encryption, back-up systems) is in place and operational to ensure both quality standards and the integrity and validity of information.
 2. The reliability of the technology delivery system is as failsafe as possible.
 3. A centralized system provides support for building and maintaining the distance education infrastructure.
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Course Development Benchmarks

4. Guidelines regarding minimum standards are used for course development, design, and delivery, while learning outcomes—not the availability of existing technology—determine the technology being used to deliver course content.
 5. Instructional materials are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet program standards.
 6. Courses are designed to require students to engage themselves in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as part of their course and program requirements.
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Teaching/Learning Benchmarks

7. Student interaction with faculty and other students is an essential characteristic and is facilitated through a variety of ways, including voice-mail and/or e-mail.
 8. Feedback to student assignments and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner.
 9. Students are instructed in the proper methods of effective research, including assessment of the validity of resources.
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Course Structure Benchmarks

10. Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine (1) if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn at a distance and (2) if they have access to the minimal technology required by the course design.
 11. Students are provided with supplemental course information that outlines course objectives, concepts, and ideas, and learning outcomes for each course are summarized in a clearly written, straightforward statement.
 12. Students have access to sufficient library resources that may include a “virtual library” accessible through the World Wide Web.
 13. Faculty and students agree upon expectations regarding times for student assignment completion and faculty response.
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Student Support Benchmarks

14. Students receive information about programs, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services.
 15. Students are provided with hands-on training and information to aid them in securing material through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, news services, and other sources.
 16. Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to technical assistance, including detailed instructions regarding the electronic media used, practice sessions prior to the beginning of the course, and convenient access to technical support staff.
 17. Questions directed to student service personnel are answered accurately and quickly, with a structured system in place to address student complaints.
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Faculty Support Benchmarks

18. Technical assistance in course development is available to faculty, who are encouraged to use it.
 19. Faculty members are assisted in the transition from classroom teaching to online instruction and are assessed during the process.
 20. Instructor training and assistance, including peer mentoring, continues through the progression of the online course.
 21. Faculty members are provided with written resources to deal with issues arising from student use of electronically-accessed data.
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Evaluation and Assessment Benchmarks

22. The program’s educational effectiveness and teaching/learning process is assessed through an evaluation process that uses several methods and applies specific standards.
 23. Data on enrollment, costs, and successful/innovative uses of technology are used to evaluate program effectiveness.
 24. Intended learning outcomes are reviewed regularly to ensure clarity, utility, and appropriateness.
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Source: Phipps and Merisotis (2000, pp. 2-3). Note: Benchmarks have been numbered to facilitate reference within this paper.

This paper (a) reviews 47 instructor competencies deemed necessary for an effective online learning program and (b) outlines a training program for Patten University—a traditional brick-and-mortar college that is transitioning to become an international multi-campus university with a significant online component. The first section describes Patten's institutional setting. The second section summarizes the characteristics of a learner-centered program and describes why a learner-centered program is important to the university. The third section lists 47 competencies, grouping and discussing them according to whether each is needed prior to, during, or after the online course. The fourth section outlines a training program for new online instructors at Patten University. The final section summarizes this information and presents conclusions.

Institutional Setting

Patten University is a private, coeducational, interdenominational Christian college that provides undergraduate and graduate education. Patten's program emphasizes three core values: (a) learning, (b) faith, and (c) community (Patten College, 2002, p. 8). President Gary Moncher (2003) notes that "This institution wants to make a difference," not just in the lives of students, but also to the local and worldwide communities.

Located in Oakland, California, Patten houses the Church of God's Theological Seminary West (Patten 2002, p. 9; Moncher, 2003) and has extension sites or cooperative programs in California (Fountain Valley, Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Jose, and San Quentin State Prison), Oregon, New Mexico, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka. Patten also cooperatively offers a professional certificate program to support the Western Region of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (Frank Markow, personal communication).

The university, accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, has about 700 students. On its main campus, Patten currently offers degrees and certificates in majors that

are listed in Table 1. Overseas programs primarily focus on business-related courses and degrees. Extension sites within the United States currently offer only ministry- or profession-related Associate degrees (Patten, 2002, p. 35; Frank Markow, personal communication).

In early 2003, the Church of God requested that Patten create an online ministry-related degree program to provide training to the denomination's pastors. The Church of God estimates that about 70 percent of its pastors lack bachelor degrees. Approximately 10,000 Church of God pastors are located in the western United States—many in small communities that are distant from religious colleges (Frank Markow, personal communication). Many of these pastors are bi-vocational adult learners.

The Importance of a Learner-Centered Program

Universities are under increasing pressure to demonstrate educational effectiveness and "focus on institutional purposes and results" (WASC, 2001, p. 4). Simultaneously universities are faced with (a) a more mobile student population and changing attendance patterns which leads to "a decline in institutional impact and control over the educational experience and curricula of students" (p. 2), (b) "higher expectations for the performance of graduates" (p. 2), and (c) "concern over rising costs of higher education" (p. 2). Increasingly, "[Students] are viewed as consumers who have a choice not only about *whether* to invest in education but also *where* to enroll" (Low, 2000, p. 3 [italics from the original]).

Once enrolled, retention becomes an issue. Wlodkowski, Mauldin, and Campbell (2002) state that about three-fourths of students who dropped out of two midwestern colleges indicated a desire to return to their respective schools in the future; however, Wlodkowski, et al., also noted: "These findings are typical of exit survey results, though our previous studies indicate that adult students who leave school rarely return to the same college" (p. 4).

Wlodkowski, et al., surveyed former learners at the two colleges to determine why students chose to leave prior to graduation. The most often cited reasons were (a) lack of time (most often due to conflicting demands with family and work responsibilities), (b) lack of money (including lack of financial aid), (c) quality of advising (including lack of contact with advisers, incorrect advising), (d) quality of teaching, and (e) peer interaction (including lack of community among distance learners, age differences). Regarding the advising issue, Low (2003) notes:

Quality academic advising has surfaced as one of the most predominant needs identified across all institutional types, as well as among students across numerous demographic characteristics. The importance cannot be overemphasized—students are adamant—they want, need, and expect the faculty to provide some level of meaningful advising support to them as they begin to make important academic decisions. Remember that students do not enter the institution knowing how to make these decisions.

Data from hundreds of institutions over the past four years are conclusive—generally, students prefer faculty advisors over professional advisors. In fact, the data reveal lower expectations for professional advisors than for faculty advisors. One message is clear—better academic advising is a trademark of the most successful institutions. As campuses confront competing demands for faculty time, the expectations of students regarding advising must not be ignored. (p. 31)

Note that two of the five most frequently cited reasons by students who left school involve elements that directly relate to classroom interactions—quality of teaching and peer interaction. A third—contact with advisors—could conceivably draw on or benefit from classroom interactions. For example, if students successfully develop relationships with instructors, a benefit might include frequent informal advising contacts (as long as the advisors do not dispense conflicting, incomplete, or incorrect information).

For an online program—with the absence of hallway contacts and informal face-to-face interaction, virtual classroom interaction becomes vital. "[In] the online environment . . . we need to be much more deliberate [than in face-to-face classrooms] in paying attention to who our students are and what they need because we are not physically seeing or interacting with them on

a daily basis" (Palloff and Pratt, 2003, pp. 124-125). White (2000) notes that "online education is structured around the dynamics of human communication" (p. 1). Effective delivery of online learning programs requires a learner-focused approach because we cannot teach but can only facilitate acquisition of knowledge (Palloff and Pratt, 2003). Maryellen Weimer (2002) states, "Being learner-centered focuses attention squarely on learning: what the student is learning, how the student is learning, the conditions under which the student is learning, whether the student is retaining and applying learning, and how current learning positions the student for future learning (p. xvi, as quoted by Palloff and Pratt, 2003, p. 125).

Regarding community, Palloff and Pratt (2001) state:

In distance education, attention needs to be paid to the developing sense of community within the group of participants in order for the learning process to be successful. The learning community is the vehicle through which learning occurs online. Members depend on each other to achieve the learning outcomes for the course Without the support and participation of a learning community, there is no online course. (p. 29)

Thus, given the importance of peer interactions in online courses and the importance of peer interactions in retention, it follows that online instructors face a dual challenge:

1. How to present course content and promote learning in the virtual environment.
2. How to foster development of a community of learners.

Key Instructor Knowledge and Competencies

Definition of Competency

"Competency" means a "condition or quality of being competent; ability; fitness; specif. legal capability, power, or jurisdiction" (Guralnik, 1984, p. 289). Guralnik defines "competent" as:

1. Well qualified; capable ; fit [a competent doctor].
2. Sufficient ; adequate [a competent understanding of the law].
3. Permissible or properly belonging (with "to").
4. [Law] Legally qualified, authorized, or fit. (p. 289)

Kerka (1998) says competence

is individualized, emphasizes outcomes (what individuals know and can do), and allows flexible pathways for achieving the outcomes. It makes as clear as possible what is to be achieved and the standards for measuring achievement. In theory, it overcomes the divide between hands and mind, theory and practice, general and vocational education (§ 2).

However, Kerka also notes that opponents of competency-based education and training (CBET) argue that CBET is "excessively reductionist, narrow, rigid, atomized, and theoretically, empirically, and pedagogically unsound" (§ 3), too often ignoring "the connections between the tasks; the attributes that underlie performance; the meaning, intention, or disposition to act; the context of performance; and the effect of interpersonal and ethical aspects" (§ 4).

Admittedly, the competency approach lends itself to creation of checklists (such as the one that follows) and might seem to imply that a minimum level of performance is acceptable rather than setting a higher bar or striving for a "standard of excellence" (§ 5). However, what is intended here is an integrated or holistic approach—one that " sees competence as a complex combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values displayed in the context of task performance" (§ 6). Kerka further states that "This approach recognizes levels of competence—entry/novice, experienced, specialist—rather than a once for all attainment. Interpreted broadly, competence is not trained behavior but thoughtful capabilities and a developmental process" (§ 6). Thus, rather than dissecting and focusing on individual competencies, judgment suggests that, for some professions (e.g., online instructor), true competency (a) requires mastery of all of the individual competencies, including complex combinations, (b) requires employment of a

variety of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, and (c) appropriately comprises a standard of excellence.

Knowledge Requirements

In addition to competencies addressed herein, online instructors must also master the subject or subjects being taught. Mastery of the online instruction competencies will not assure that the information presented in a course will be accurate or that the instructor will be able to effectively engage students regarding topics with which the instructor is unfamiliar or ignorant.

List of Competencies

Numerous books and papers have been written that describe how to develop online courses, choose courseware, interact with learners, and teach online. Table 2 presents a list of competencies gleaned from some of those resources.

Competencies Needed Prior to Start of a Course

Instructors need 18 of the listed competencies prior to the course. A key competency is the ability to create an effective online syllabus (Competency 8; Ko and Rosen, 2001, pp. 67, 71) that lays out the terms of the class interaction, responsibilities, musts and don'ts of behavior, and the geography of the course. Several of the other competencies feed directly into this syllabus. For example, the instructor should be clear about course requirements (Competency 2; after Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 28), communicate high expectations (Competency 5; Coghlan, 2002, bullet 9), and define participation and grading criteria (Competency 10; Ko and Rosen, 2001, p. 68) as these components should be spelled out in the syllabus. Instructors also need to consider factors related to Competency 29 (manage student expectations; Ko and Rosen, 2001, pp. 69-70) because the syllabus should include information designed to dispel expectations of immediate

Table 2A

Competencies for online instructors, noting whether the competency will be of primary importance before, during and/or after the course

Competency	Source	Before	During	After
1. Act like a learning facilitator rather than a professor	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 36)		v	
2. Be clear about course requirements	After Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 28)	v	v	
3. Be willing to contact students who are not participating	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 31)		v	
4. Become a lifelong learner	Ko and Rosen (2001, p. 292)	v	v	
5. Communicate high expectations	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)	v	v	
6. Communicate technical information in plain English	Coghlan (2002, bullet 9)	v	v	
7. Create a warm and inviting atmosphere that promotes the development of a sense of community among participants	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 32)		v	
8. Create an effective online syllabus—one that lays out the terms of the class interaction—the expected responsibilities and duties, the grading criteria, the musts and don'ts of behavior, and explains the geography of the course	Ko and Rosen (2001, pp. 67, 71)	v		
9. Deal effectively with disruptive students	Ko and Rosen (2001, pp. 244-245)		v	
10. Define participation and grading criteria	Ko and Rosen (2001, p. 68)	v		
11. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)		v	
12. Develop relationships	After Palloff and Pratt (2001, pp. 161-162)		v	
13. Effectively and efficiently manage (administer) the course	Ko and Rosen (2001, p. 211)		v	v
14. Effectively use whatever technology has been selected to support online learning	After Palloff and Pratt (2001, pp. 26-28)	v	v	v
15. Emphasize time on task	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)		v	
16. Encourage contacts between students and faculty	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)		v	
17. Encourage students to bring real-life examples into the online classroom	Palloff and Pratt (2003, p. 134)		v	
18. Evaluate ourselves	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 34)	v	v	v
19. Evaluate students	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 34)		v	v

Source: Compiled by T. C. Smith

Table 2B

Competencies for online instructors, noting whether the competency will be of primary importance before, during and/or after the course

Competency	Source	Before	During	After
20. Foster learner centeredness	Hootstein (2002, ¶ 4)		v	
21. Give prompt feedback	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)		v	v
22. Harness the technology	Conrad (1999, bullet 14)	v	v	v
23. Help students develop critical thinking skills	After Pepicello and Rice (2000, p. 52)		v	
24. Help students identify and use appropriate learning techniques	After Pepicello and Rice (2000, pp. 53-54)		v	
25. Help students identify strengths and areas of needed improvement	After Pepicello and Rice (2000, p. 46)		v	
26. Keep informed of the latest trends and issues; continually improve your skills and knowledge	Ko and Rosen (2001, p. 276)	v	v	
27. Maintain the momentum of the course	After Coghlan (2002, #momentum)		v	
28. Make the transition to the online learning environment	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 35)	v	v	
29. Manage student expectations	Ko and Rosen (2001, pp. 69-70)	v	v	
30. Mandate participation. Step in and set limits if participation wanes or if the conversation is headed in the wrong direction	Palloff and Pratt (2001, pp. 31, 36)		v	
31. Model good participation	After Palloff and Pratt (2001, pp. 24, 121)		v	
32. Network with others involved in online education	Ko and Rosen (2001, pp. 291-292)	v	v	
33. Prepare students for online learning	Ko and Rosen (2001, p. 194)	v	v	
34. Promote collaborative learning	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 36)		v	
35. Promote reflection	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 33)		v	v
36. Provide structure for learners but allow for flexibility and negotiation	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 36)	v	v	
37. Remember that there are people attached to the words on the screen	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 31)		v	
38. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)		v	
39. Respect privacy issues	Ko and Rosen (2001, pp. 238-239)		v	v
40. Set up a well-organized course site	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 36)		v	

Source: Compiled by T. C. Smith

Table 2C

Competencies for online instructors, noting whether the competency will be of primary importance before, during and/or after the course

Competency	Source	Before	During	After
41. Teach students about online learning	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 30)		v	
42. Translate content for online delivery	Moore, Winograd, and Lange (2001, p. 9.3)	v		
43. Use active learning techniques	Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17)		v	
44. Use best practices to promote participation	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 118)		v	
45. Use humor	Coghlan (2002, "Getting Started" bullet 8)		v	
46. Use the web as a resource	Ko and Rosen (2001, p. 105)	v	v	
47. Most of all, have fun and open yourself to learning as much from your students as they will learn from one another and from you!	Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 36)		v	

Source: Compiled by T. C. Smith

responses to questions posed by students. The syllabus should not be regarded as inflexible, but is intended to provide structure for the course while allowing for flexibility and negotiation (Competency 36; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 36; see also Table 1, Benchmark 13). All of this (and other) information should be communicated in plain English (Competency 6; Coghlan, 2002, bullet 9).

Instructors should be able to effectively use whatever technology has been selected for course delivery (Competency 14; After Palloff and Pratt, 2001, pp. 26-28); this competency will be needed as the course is set up prior to the class and will continue to play an important role throughout the course. Note that additional software and hardware may need to be mastered (Competency 22; Conrad, 1999, bullet 14) because it is likely that instructors will develop content in Microsoft Word™, Excel™, Adobe Acrobat™, or other formats (and, as the course progresses, students probably also will submit completed work in those formats).

In addition to technological issues, instructors need to be able to set up a well-organized course site (Competency 40; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 36) and translate content for online delivery (Competency 42; Moore, Winograd, and Lange, 2001, p. 9.3). The latter requires information about online instruction trends and issues and a willingness to continually improve related skills and knowledge (Competency 26; Ko and Rosen, 2001, p. 276). Web-based resources often provide a valuable resource for involving learners in the search for and discovery of pertinent content, thus instructors need to be able to develop exercises that take advantage of the web (Competency 46; Ko and Rosen, 2001, p. 105). Instructors will benefit from an ability to network with others involved in online education (Competency 32; Ko and Rosen, 2001, pp. 291-292), continually evaluating themselves and their skills (Competency 18; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 34) and, in effect, becoming a lifelong learner (Competency 4; Ko and Rosen,

2001, p. 292). All of these competencies are key to making the transition to the online learning environment (Competency 28; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 35) and getting ready to prepare students for online learning (Competency 33; Ko and Rosen, 2001, p. 194).

Competencies Needed During the Course

After a good foundation (syllabus) has been developed, course material translated, and the instructor has a good grasp of the technology, these tools can be delivered and explained to and discussed with students. As flaws (unclear or imprecise text, unreasonable expectations, errors) become evident, they can be corrected and modifications to course calendar and requirements negotiated.

As the course begins, instructors need to transition into their role as facilitator (Competency 1; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 36), focusing not only on course content but also on development of community (Competency 7; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 32) within the course. By developing community, the instructor begins to address one of the five primary causes for attrition (see p. 5 above). Recall also that Benchmark 7 (see Table 1) of Phipps and Merisotis, (2000) indicates that student-student and student-instructor interaction is essential. Some key aspects in community development are to promote collaborative learning (Competency 34; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 36) and develop reciprocity and cooperation among students (Competency 11; Merisotis and Phipps, 1999, p. 17). Ideally, the instructor should also begin to develop relationships with students (Competency 12; after Palloff and Pratt, 2001) and encourage contacts between students and faculty (Competency 16; Merisotis and Phipps, 1999, p. 17). Especially in courses that have many new online learners, instructors will need to teach students about online learning (Competency 41; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 30), promote active learning techniques (Competency 43; Moore, Winograd, and Lange, 2001, p. 9.3), and help them

link this delivery mode with their own personal learning styles (Competencies 24 [after Pepicello and Rice, 2000, pp. 53-54] and 38; Merisotis and Phipps, 1999, p. 17).

With respect to effective and efficient course management (Competency 13; Ko and Rosen, 2001, p. 211), instructors should use best practices to promote participation (Competency 44; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 118), emphasizing time on task (Competency 15; Merisotis and Phipps, 1999, p. 17), evaluating students (Competency 19; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 34), giving prompt feedback (Competency 21; Merisotis and Phipps, 1999, p. 17), modeling good participation (Competency 31; after Palloff and Pratt, 2001, pp. 24, 121), and, when appropriate, using humor (Competency 45; Coghlan, 2002, "Getting Started" bullet 8). Instructors should foster learner centeredness (Competency 20; Hootstein, 2002, 4), promote reflection (Competency 35; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 33), helping students to identify strengths and areas of needed improvement (Competency 25; after Pepicello and Rice, 2000, p. 46) and develop critical thinking skills (Competency 23; after Pepicello and Rice, 2000, p. 52), and encouraging them to bring real-life examples to the online classroom (Competency 17; Palloff and Pratt, 2003, p. 134). This learner-centered approach helps students become aware that they are valued and have information and perspectives that may aid others in their learning quests.

Instructors must maintain the momentum of the course (Competency 27; after Coghlan, 2002, #momentum). This may require taking some actions that might not normally be needed in a face-to-face setting, such as mandating participation and directing the discussion if headed in the wrong direction (Competency 30; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, pp. 31, 36). Instructors also should be willing to contact students (typically by phone) who are not participating (Competency 3; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 31) or are disruptive (Competency 9; Ko and Rosen, 2001, pp. 244-245). The instructor should remember that there are real people attached to the words on the

screen (Competency 37; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 31) and respect privacy issues (Competency 39; Ko and Rosen, 2001, pp. 238-239).

Finally, as the course progresses, Palloff and Pratt (2001) note: "Most of all, have fun and open yourself to learning as much from your students as they will learn from one another and from you!" (p. 36; Competency 47).

Competencies Needed After the Course

As noted in Table 2, several of the needed competencies will be useful after the course has concluded. For example, if the course platform uses an online gradebook, the instructor ideally should be able to export the grades for transmittal to the university registrar (part of Competencies 13 [Ko and Rosen, 2001, p. 211] and 14; after Palloff and Pratt, 2001, pp. 26-28). Obviously grading requires evaluating students (Competency 19; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 34), but instructors should also reflect on the course as a whole (Competency 35; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 33) and evaluate the various student comments, exercises, roles, and outcomes (Competency 18; Palloff and Pratt, 2001, p. 34), give prompt feedback to students on final papers and tests (Competency 21; Merisotis and Phipps, 1999, p. 17), and continue to respect individual privacy issues long after the course has ended (Competency 39; Ko and Rosen, 2001, pp. 238-239).

Outline of Proposed Training for New Online Instructors

As previously indicated, it is not reasonable to expect experienced face-to-face faculty to magically begin to function well in the online environment. As noted in Table 1, Phipps and Merisotis (2000) indicate that faculty members should be assisted in transitioning to the online environment (Benchmark 19) and trained and mentored (Benchmark 20), and provided with written resources regarding issues that are likely to arise in online courses (Benchmark 21).

Initial and ongoing training, mentoring, and assessment or effectiveness will be key to the success of Patten's online learning program.

The length of the initial training program has yet to be determined, depending in part on the selection of an appropriate learning management system. The content will cover technological aspects of the learning management system (LMS) and a selected written materials (such as the references cited in this paper)—in essence comprising the materials needed to satisfy Benchmark 21. Plans are to deliver the training online, using the selected LMS, with the possible inclusion of one or more hands-on face-to-face lab sessions to assist instructors in the initial exploration of LMS capabilities.

Trainees also will experience the LMS from the perspective of a student learner by reading selected resources and engaging in collaborative learning through online discussions. Ideally the trainees will begin to form a mutual support community that will persist after the initial training concludes, furthering strategic development of Patten's existing communities (Smith, 2003). Plans are to facilitate communication within this community—some of whom may not be located on the campus—by establishing an online forum for online faculty and involving one or more mentors in the forum. In addition, mentors will be available for private consultation and will shadow new instructors.

Comments from students, instructors, and mentors, assessments of learning outcomes, and other data will be gathered, summarized, and used to (a) determine future training needs, (b) adjust future design of individual courses, and (c) modify the LMS. In addition, literature related to online learning will continue to be gathered, analyzed, and used to foster development of best practices.

Summary and Conclusions

The effectiveness of distance learning must be measured in results—quality learning—by students (Phipps and Merisotis, 2000). Key benchmarks, essential to ensuring excellence in Internet-based distance learning, address factors such as technological issues and institutional support, course development, teaching and learning, course structure, student support, faculty support, and evaluation and assessment. Teaching in an online environment requires specific sets of skills (competencies) that "move beyond traditional models of pedagogy into new practices that are more facilitative" (Palloff and Pratt (2001, p. 20).

This paper (a) concludes that 47 instructor competencies are deemed necessary for an effective online learning program and (b) outlines an instructor training and support program that will lay a proper foundation and corresponds with three of the 24 benchmarks for excellence.

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